

The Lady of the Good Will Mines
by
E. A. Steiner
Outlook. June 24, 1911
HV 2345 S

HV2345
.574
1911

HV 2345



AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

HV2345-

Outlook, June 24, 1911

21

S
copy one

+

The Lady of the Good Will Mines

By E. A. Steiner

With Drawings by Sarah K. Smith

"IF I were a poet!" A thousand times I have said this, and, saying it, lost my chance to write plainly and honestly what I have seen and felt. So now I am going to write, although I am not a poet. I am going to write of a woman and a man. The two as far apart in wealth and culture as are the places in which they were born—thousands of leagues apart, and the great ocean between; so far apart that they could not speak each other's language. She knew but two words of his, and he three of hers—and two of these he could not, or should not, have used in the presence of a woman.

The two words of his language which she knew were *boly*, which means "it hurts" or "does it hurt?" and *dobre*, which means "good" or "I will make it good." The only English word that he could speak with propriety was "Lady," and by that he meant this particular woman, for she was, in the true historic and linguistic sense, a lady. The other two words he had learned from the mine foreman, and that explains why they could not be spoken in her presence.

Who was this woman and who this man, so far apart and yet so near each other?

The Lady was the best product of a civilization which gave woman her fullest opportunity without spoiling her by ease and luxury. She was a Christian, and religion had in her borne its full fruitage: gentleness of spirit, strength of character, and love for her fellow-men.

Her home was built above the mines where black diamonds were dug by patient toilers, and she early realized that it was warmed and lighted and she and her children fed by the product of this bitter toil. She made the Good Will property a model mining town, which was no easy task; for miners are not model men, and the hazard of the work makes them reckless with money and morals.

She did all this before such a thing as the "social conscience" was discovered;

even before the reward for such tasks came in having one's picture printed in the magazines.

In Good Will, and there alone, in all that bleak region, miners' huts were clean and sanitary; there were good schools and a hospital, and the ugly culm-piles were not permitted to crowd too closely upon human habitations. The task of mining was hard and the risks great, but there were a master and a mistress who were the miners' friends, and that made the work easier and the mines safer.

Then dawned upon the industrial world the age of consolidation, and the companies pressed closer and closer upon the Good Will property, which was not in the market. The master of the Good Will Mines would not sell. The miners were his friends, and he knew the spirit of the great companies, which cared for dividends and dividends alone. But his coal was left standing on the tracks while other coal traveled to the markets; mountains of uncartered coal choked the mouth of the pit; and then he sold because he had to.

It was not aiggardly company, this; it paid all that the property was worth—millions and millions of dollars. The exact figures would make one dizzy to contemplate, although we are becoming calloused to the shock which comes from the misfortunes of great fortunes. When the master of the Good Will died, he left all this wealth to the Lady.

Did she move to New York and build herself a mansion on Fifth Avenue big enough to lose her soul in? Did she take her daughters and hawk them on the matrimonial markets of Europe, selling them to the highest titled bidder? No. She stayed in Good Will. The mines were sold, it is true; but the miners were still there. Those who helped to make the wealth were gone—the Welsh and English miners of twenty years ago; and their places were taken by crude, unlettered, half-heathen peasants, who could not speak her lan-

guage or understand her motives. She stayed in Good Will with the miners, standing between them and the rapacious company—their advocate and friend, their “lady bountiful.”

If I were a poet, I should not write about the town Good Will, and I fear if I were a millionaire I would not live there.

Years ago those mountains were beautiful—the trees green and golden in the spring and autumn; but now the hills are disemboweled and refuse lies about in cold, dreary heaps, with here and there evidences that the Creator artist is trying to bring back the beauty of which men have robbed him.

A vine has caught in a scanty bit of soil, and He is draping it about the culm-heaps; a tree is ineffectively struggling to spread its branches, its leaves parched from breathing the sulphur-laden air. The creeks which ran merrily to the river are now choked by rotten tree stumps, around which empty tin cans, beer barrels, and broken whisky flasks cling, holding back the thick filth in which no fish can live and no child can play and dream of golden days.

The model village has almost fallen to decay; the houses are feeders for dividends, the paint eaten off, the fences broken down, the shingles in shreds that do not keep out the torrential rains. In vain the Lady protested; the more she protested, the more unbearable life became in Good Will, and yet the Lady stays, because the miners are still there.

The man was born in the Carpathians, in a picturesque village by a pure stream. He was baptized into the Greek Catholic Church, and they gave him the name of the patron saint of the place—Joseph. Only the fit survive infancy in that village, for the climate is rigorous, life is Spartan, the food coarse and not always plentiful. Toil begins early and is unremitting.

Joseph grew to be a strong lad, was confirmed, found his pleasures in drinking and dancing, courted in his rough way, married and begot children. The world was small; it began where the geese grazed, at the edge of the village pasture, and ended with the last acre on the Baron's estate. Wealth Joseph never hoped to possess, for that was in the possession of a few and remained there. Of honors and station in life he never

dreamed. He was a poor peasant's son; his father left him a cabin and three acres of land, and he would think himself fortunate to die with these things still in his possession; for the love of strong drink was growing among the peasants and the mortgaging of property to the Jews was becoming a common thing.

Into Joseph's discouragement one day there shone a ray of light. Creeping slowly through the valleys, leaping over the mountains, came a new hope. Tidings from America told of wealth, of mountains of gold, awaiting those who dared. The idea that wealth belonged to a few, to those born to it and those who were shrewd enough to bargain for it, was nothing but a cheap myth. In America any man who dared got it by using a shovel and a pickax. Even the toilers might reach a high station in life in this New World—this wonderful America.

One and another went from that village in the Carpathians and returned with money. What mattered it if they came back smelling of carbolic acid, with scrawny skins, limping limbs, and lungs which labored like the blacksmith's wheezy bellows? They came back with money and bought land—ten, twenty, and fifty acres—and the Baron's estates, for ages in the possession of one family, began to dwindle, while the peasants built themselves brick houses, put in iron stoves, and had a pig-killing regularly twice a year. Joseph could not resist the sweeping current which carried the young manhood away across the sea. Many from his village had gone to Good Will and wrote back about the wages, the meat every day, the beautiful cottages, and the Lady; so he went.

Thirty-two years of age he was, his passport said, five feet six inches high, of dark complexion, gray eyes, and no bodily blemish. He had to leave his cabin, his wife, and two children; but in two, at the most three, years he would be back, and then the good times would be theirs. In the meanwhile “*Z boghem*” (with God). The wife cried and the children cried; he did not cry until they were out of sight. Then came the excitement of a first far journey; the pain died in his heart, and the fierce passion for saving money killed the homesickness.

When he reached America, he bought a railway ticket to Good Will. Once there, he found a boarding-place with twenty others in the house of a widowed country woman; he bought a cap and a lamp, a pickax and a shovel, and went to work, helping a miner. He lived almost like an animal, thinking neither of body nor soul; only of wife and children and of saving enough money to send home to buy land.

For a year he helped another miner; then came the chance to do that perilous but remunerative thing, blasting coal, by himself.

From the company's store he bought powder and fuse, and went to work in his chamber. One year, two years more, and then house, wife, children, and land.

Fiercely he dug into the unresponsive rock, and lighted the fuse, which was defective, and damp from the sweat of his body. He went back behind the sheltering rock and waited; but the fire did not leap, the shower of coal did not fall. Cautiously he crept near, broke off the seared end of the fuse, lighted it again, and leaped back to his shelter. Again no blast, and he waited five, ten long minutes. The foreman passed by and said the two words of English with which Joseph had grown familiar, and others that he but vaguely guessed at. The foreman was warning him not to return to that chamber, but Joseph did not understand. He was seeing the land, the coveted land; so he crept back, bent over the reluctant fuse, and the charge struck him straight in the eyes.

When he was brought to the top of the mine with burned face and singed hair, the Lady was there to receive him; for that was just why she had stayed in Good Will. She was there with her doctor and her nurses. She asked, "Will he live?" The doctor replied: "I am afraid he *will*—he is not hurt badly, but his eyes are gone."

Joseph lay in the hospital in a soft bed. There were bandages over his eyes and it was dark all around him. With skillful fingers gentle nurses changed the bandages and fed him dainties between his burned lips. He was hurt, he knew; but as he felt his swelling muscle and supple limbs he thought there was nothing serious the

matter, and that in a week or a month he would be at work again, getting money for the land.

One morning a man came to him, called him Joe, and told him that he had brought him money, two hundred dollars—all his if he would sign a paper promising not to go to court and ask for more.

Why should he not sign a paper? Why should he ask for more money? What a benevolent gentleman! So Joe made his mark, for he could not write. There were two witnesses, and they signed their names.

A week passed, and another and still another before they removed the bandage from his eyes. He felt relieved with the pressure gone, but something seemed still left lying there—it shut the daylight out. Why not remove it all? The pain was gone. He felt with his hard fingers. The bandage *was* all gone; yet he could not see. A great cry like that of a wounded beast rose from his breast. Blind! Blind! Blind! A beggar! No land, no home—all gone! But he had two hundred dollars which the benevolent gentleman had given him. He could pay his passage home and have one hundred and seventy dollars left.

For one hundred and seventy dollars he had sold his eyes!

The Lady was there. That was why she had stayed in Good Will. She touched his sightless eyes and said: "*Boly?*" (Does it hurt?)

And he cried like a child: "*Boly! boly! boly!*"

Then she said, "*Dobre! dobre! dobre!*" (It will be good! It will be good!)

She meant to fight his case for him. The fuse the company had sold him was defective; he was not sufficiently instructed in the use of powder; the foreman's warning was ineffective, for he did not understand it.

The Lady consulted her lawyer, she appealed to the courts, she fought the company. That was her business; that was why she stayed in Good Will.

But the company had the paper, Joseph had signed it in the presence of witnesses; he had accepted two hundred dollars. There it was in black and white: he had assumed the risk, he had been properly warned; and in consideration

of the payment of two hundred dollars he had signed away the right to go to the courts.

Winter had come upon Good Will, and with it bitter, biting cold. The Lady with the millions had gone neither to Florida nor Lakewood nor California. She stayed in Good Will just *because* bitter winter had come, and the miners were there, and Christmas was near—the season of peace and good will.

Every one was talking about the Lady's Christmas. As far as one could see from the hilltop where her house stood, over many a mile of wrecked landscape, past huge breakers and mountains of culm which marked the location of the "patches," they talked of the Lady's Christmas. For two weeks she had been in the city buying, buying, buying, for the miners' children. Toys and candies, stockings, caps, and mittens, and all the things that delight the little ones. Four thousand children were on her list and on her heart, and all of these were waiting for the Lady's Christmas.

At last it came, with the jingle of bells and the lighted Christmas trees. Every school-house and every church in every "patch" for miles around Good Will had a Christmas tree laden with the Lady's Christmas gifts. The children came, and when they went back to the little huts they were gladder than they had been all the year. The biggest tree was in the Lady's house, and thither the children of Good Will came, while their mothers and fathers looked in at the window; for the room was not large enough for all.

Through the drifting snow they led Joseph, the blind miner, to see the Christmas tree. A blind man to see the Christmas tree! As he came in the children made room for him, and he was led nearer and nearer to the tree under the radiance of the light which he could not see. Then he felt the hand of the Lady over his eyes.

"*Boly?*" (Does it hurt?) she asked; and he broke into bitter lamentations.

"*Boly! boly! boly!*"

And she said, in that quiet and solemn voice of hers which sounded like hushed organ tones, "*Dobre! dobre! dobre!*" and put a paper into his hand. The Greek

Catholic priest who stood by took the paper and read it—translating it for Joseph.

"I wish I could give you your sight for a Christmas gift, but I cannot perform miracles; so I give you one thousand dollars—" Then Joseph cried, hysterically: "*Dobre! dobre!*" But the priest stopped him.

"A ticket to your home in Hungary—"

"*Dobre! dobre!*" Joseph cried, and again the priest checked him.

"And ten dollars a month until the thousand dollars begin to bear sufficient interest."

Then Joseph fell on his face and stretched his hands out toward the warmth where he knew the tree was and where the Lady must be, and, pressing his hands to his heart, cried:

"*Lady! Boly! boly!*" (meaning that his heart hurt from joy). And the Lady, taking his rough hands in hers, said: "*Dobre! dobre! dobre!*"

Again I am wishing for the poet's pen to tell what I have seen and felt, and again I write extraordinary facts in an ordinary way. This time I write of defeated soldiers returning home after the battle. As they go to their ship in the gray morning the city through which they pass is as unconscious of their going as it was of their coming.

Thousands of leagues away are the soldiers' mothers who bore them in pain, nourished them with the fruit of hard toil, and clothed them in the woof of their own unremitting industry. Mothers, wives, and children parted from them in tears wiped from their weather-beaten cheeks by the gentle touch of hope.

These soldiers came to our shores determined to fight and win. They did not ask, "Is the day long or short?" They did not fear the dark and damp of the mine or the scorching fires of the belching furnaces. They obeyed the harsh command of their captains, stolidly facing danger and death.

The battle of the year is over—thirty thousand and more were slain; while more than ten times that number were wounded and disabled.

The vast numbers of those who gave life and health for a pittance of wage are these returning wanderers who were born,



"HIS ROUGH, TOIL-WORN FINGERS WILL MOVE OVER THEIR FACES, AND BY TOUCH ALONE WILL HE KNOW HOW THE LITTLE ONES HAVE GROWN"

bred, and nourished under alien skies, and whose names cannot be pronounced by our unskilled tongues.

It is of these survivors who are going home that I wish to write. In broken ranks and small companies they march, led by a man whose interest in them is measured by the number of dollars in their pockets. A pitiable sight are the vanquished ones; hobbling on wooden legs, swinging loose coat sleeves, breathing the damp air with a wheeze which speaks all too plainly of lungs impaired. And, most pathetic of all, carefully feeling their way through the never-changing dark, are those whose eyes were given in the battle—that we might see the more.

Among all these fifteen hundred who have given strength, health, limbs, and eyes to society, only one leaves this country with a reward, and a friend whose solicitude reaches to the ship and across the ocean to the very village from which he came.

No, the Lady cannot give him back his eyes, and what a pity that she cannot! A great, strong fellow he is, this Joseph Polyak. His face almost handsome, now

that the veil of blindness hangs over it. His muscular body from head to foot clothed in the best new garments, all a gift from the Lady—besides the money and the pension.

To my inquiry as to his well-being he answered with a pathetic shrug of his shoulders: "*Dobre! dobre!*" Then he told me again and again what the Lady had done for him. Reverently he raised his hand toward heaven, as if to invoke the Deity.

"If I were the Pope," he said, "I would make her a saint." To his sightless eyes I am sure she wears a halo—and that is enough.

The steamship company treats the returning immigrant with the same scant courtesy with which it treated him when he came. In a long, damp shed fifteen hundred of them waited, with no place to warm themselves or to rest their weary feet. They were driven rudely and harshly up the gangplank and their tickets torn from their hands. There was no one to relieve them of their bags and bundles, although above them the cabin passengers,

who are not so profitable to the company, walked over soft rugs and breathed perfume-laden air. Courteous officers watched over these cabin passengers and directed them in civil phrases, while beneath them fifteen hundred men who had toiled and suffered to make the holiday in the cabin possible were being crowded like cattle into the steerage. Will the cabin realize this as it looks down upon that crowding host—as it sees these pale faces, flapping sleeves, and empty eye-sockets? Or will it look with suspicion upon them and call them a menace and a problem?

A steward had to be bribed to be civil to this blind man, for the steamship company does not encourage civilities to its best-paying human freight. Joseph Polyak did not complain; all he wanted besides what he already had was a little English book so that he could "teach his children the language of the Lady."

And now he is ready for the long voyage, with the little book clasped to his breast. He will sail along rugged coasts, through stormy and peaceful seas, by glorious islands, to strange harbors; but he will see nothing of the beauty of earth or sea. When he lands, he will be guided by trusted hands to the very village from which he came, and there his wife and children will be waiting for him; but he will not see them. His rough, toil-worn fingers will move over their faces, and by touch alone will he know how the little ones have grown. The wife will weep as she looks into his sightless face, and she will cry "*Boly! boly!*" as if her heart would break. But he will say, with a smile almost seraphic, "*Dobre! dobre!*" and that night, when upon their knees they ask the intercession of their saints, I am quite sure they will pray for the Lady of the Good Will Mines.

THE DEAD

BY ADELAIDE GUTHRIE

Who are the Dead?

Are they the souls who, questing, forth have fared
Through the loose doors of their frail tenements?
Who tarried not for staff, nor wine, nor bread?
Who to the stress of Night their bosoms bared,
Despite our bitter tears, our fond laments?
Are they the Dead?

Who are the Dead?

Are they the souls who, from their larger view,
Regard with quiet eyes our foolish ways?
Marvel that we should seek to stay, instead
Of speeding them to their environs new?
And smile to see the sepulchers we raise?
Are they the Dead?

Who are the Dead?

Say, rather, are not we in full-sensed life,
Bound by our sickly fears, our outworn creeds
That strangely speak of faith,—we, who are led
Apart from Love, by selfish aims and strife,
Stifled, enslaved, undone by our misdeeds,—
Are not *we* Dead?

